



CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

ILIA ILIEV

Public and Personal Involvement in Corruption Scandals in Bulgaria

2004/2005



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The aim of this paper is to discuss some options for filling the gap between the large amount of publicly available information on corruption, on the one hand, and the lack of resulting civic action in Bulgaria.

Several institutions, local and international, independent and related to the government, produce information on corruption at a regular basis. This information is systematically distributed by the media, and it seems that it attracts the attention of the citizens, since the discourses on corruption are a common topic in the everyday discussions in nowadays Bulgaria¹. Moreover, corruption has become a key concept for explaining various imperfections in the functioning of institutions and individual actors, a tool used with equal ease by the European Commission's reports on Bulgaria and by local communities' informal leaders and native analysts, so there is not only a lot of readily available information, but also a kind of consensus on how to interpret it. However, it seems that it fails to provoke the expected civic mobilization, which can partially explain why the large scale public awareness campaigns are gradually replaced by other tools for fighting corruption.

I would like to investigate again the missing link between information and action by focusing on the mechanism of the public scandals in Bulgaria. The concept of public scandal will be defined here following Jeffrey Alexander's analysis of Watergate scandal², as a process where various social groups recognize a potential danger for their basic values, and therefore get involved in different forms of social action. If we accept this definition, the public scandal offers a unique opportunity to analyze how different social actors could be mobilized, and how the information could be translated into civic action.

I. How to make the anticorruption campaigns harmless

Before starting the analysis, the first question is whether such analysis is necessary at all. One of the basic assumptions of the donor organizations was that the anticorruption campaigns can

¹ In this text I will stick to the local uses of the concept, which means that when my informants think and say that there are some corruption at stake, I will report their words without looking for further confirmation.

² Alexander, Jeffrey, 1990 Culture and Political Crisis: Watergate and Durkheimian Sociology. In: Alexander, Jeffrey (ed.) *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 187-224.

easily mobilize public support³. There was a widespread expectation that once the citizens identify the proper target, the corruption in institutions and specific individuals, a reaction would follow, and the government would be put under strong pressure to start the necessary reforms. It seems that this assumption turned wrong, and several recent reports criticize the lack of efficiency of the public awareness campaigns⁴. Moreover, it seems that the extensive discussions about corruption might turn counterproductive. In their recent analysis of the unexpected consequences of the widespread anticorruption discourses, Ivan Krastev and Georgy Ganey demonstrated how the anticorruption campaigns as a rule create a widespread public opinion that the corruption in the government and the administration has actually increased⁵, the more the government speaks about corruption, the firmer the voters' conviction in its dishonesty. The governments that launch anticorruption reforms diminish their chances to be reelected, while the civic activity of the citizens is hindered by excessive expectations, a growing cynicism discarding the modest positive results, and intimate persuasion that the whole society is penetrated by corrupted networks and the government, run by corrupted individuals, so little could be done by the private individuals. It seems that it is the better option when the efforts to mobilize civic support on anticorruption issues turn out to be inefficient; sometimes they might be even harmful.

I totally accept this argument. However, it would be too optimistic to expect that the anticorruption campaign would end soon. Too many institutional actors and individuals are involved in it. The French political scientist Nadege Ragaru distinguished at least three main categories of institutions which actively produce anti-corruption discourses in Bulgaria: international institutions, businesses, and NGOs, local NGOs and political parties. In the next paragraphs I will follow her analysis.

³ Cf. Martin Tisne and Daniel Smilov, *From the Ground Up. Assessing the Record of Anticorruption Assistance in SEE*, CEU, 2004, <www.ceu.hu/cps>

⁴ for an extensive analysis, see Bryane Michael, *The Rapid Rise of Anticorruption Industry. Towards Second Generation of Anticorruption Reforms in CEE*, in: Local Governance Brief, Spring 2004, OSI, Budapest, 17-25

⁵ Ivan Krastev and Georgy Ganey, *The Missing Incentive. Corruption, Anticorruption, and Reelection*, in: Ivan Krastev, *Shifting Obsessions. Three Essays on the Politics of Anticorruption*, CEU Press, Budapest, 2004

The corruption discourses could not be stopped by the withdrawal of a group of donors or institutional actors

The corruption became a major topic in Bulgarian media since 1997. It has almost disappeared from the media and political debates between 1990 and 1997, when the main debates dealt with fundamental questions about the Bulgarian society – should we build a new type of socialism, or should we follow the European patterns; should we apply for joining NATO, or should we join a new Russian-led alliance, etc, etc. By the end of 1996 most of these questions about the future were answered, the position of the most influential political parties in Bulgaria largely coincided, and it seems that the same consensus prevailed in the contemporary Bulgarian society.

This consensus seriously changed the agenda of the political debate in Bulgaria. The government successfully countered any discussion on the framework of its policy, arguing (not without reason) that it follows the recommendations of the international institutions, and that the state budget is prepared under the close supervision of the IMF and World Bank. The role of the government in this process was presented as a kind of advocacy, the ministers defending the interests of the voters during the negotiations with the representatives of the IMF and WB. The opposition carefully avoided questioning this approach, because its arguments might be interpreted as addressed against the basic consensus, which emerged after the period of hyperinflation. This left the opposition little ground for a serious debate on domestic and foreign policy. They needed something new, something that would allow them claiming that they would be able to follow the same consensual policy, but in a better and more competent way. The discourses on corruption provided an excellent tool and, unlike the period 1990-1997, when the basic principles of the society were at stake, this time the voters were more willing to listen to them.

In a similar development, the corruption issues in Bulgaria became a focus of interest for various international institutions after 1997. It does not mean that they were not concerned with the corruption in Bulgaria earlier, but the bulk of their attention was focused on more dramatic processes, like hyperinflation, privatization processes, or introducing a currency board. However, long-term tendencies in the policy of these institutions also had repercussions in Bulgaria. Here I will follow the argument of Nadege Ragaru and Ivan Krastev, who studied the impact of these tendencies in our country. Several tendencies

combined in 1990s, they argued, to guarantee a privileged position of the corruption issues amongst the international financial institutions.

The government of the USA had increased its pressure on them to put the corruption at the center of their agenda, because the American businesses were frustrated by what they conceived as unloyal competition of their foreign counterparts. In a parallel development, the IMF and World Bank were frustrated on their own right with the fail of several programs of theirs in the Third World, and were inclined to blame the corruption for these problems.

According to Ivan Krastev, 1997 marked an important turn also in the policy of the IMF and World Bank to Bulgaria. Sofia was practically excluded from the international financial markets since 1990, when it stopped paying the installments for its foreign debt. The prohibition ended in 1995, but Bulgaria began applying and receiving major loans since 1997. Moreover, it was after 1997 that Bulgaria became interesting for the foreign investors, when a currency board guaranteed financial stability and several state industries and monopolies were offered for privatization. The corruption was conceived by the foreign investors as a major obstacle regardless of the legal considerations. Unlike the local businesses, the foreigners lacked the necessary expertise, they did not know neither how much should be given, nor to whom. That is why, the argument of Ivan Krastev goes on, the foreign businesses considered the corruption as a specific kind of protectionist policy, accusing the local authorities of promoting it discretely and thus giving an edge of the “patriotic” businesses over the foreigners.

On the other hand, since December 1995 Bulgaria is among the 12 applicant states challenging EU enlargement. In 1997 the European Commission concluded that Bulgaria has fulfilled the political criteria for EU admission and, since then, it has been strengthening the stability of the institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. The 2002 report of the European Commission confirmed that in many areas the legal framework has been brought in line with the Treaties, secondary legislation and policies of the EU. Great criticism, however, has been focused again on the corruption. There is a huge demand for reform in this area and the level of corruption is even increasing during the last years. From the EU point of view, Bulgaria cannot make further plans for EU membership without solving the corruption problem.

These factors combined to put the corruption issues at the focus of the international institutions in Bulgaria. The results followed quickly. A group of non-governmental organizations, led by the Center for the Study of Democracy, joined in “Coalition 2000”. The

Coalition was created under a grant of the USAID and the World Bank, but latter it received grants also from the governments of Austria and Sweden. A few months latter was created a local branch of the Transparency International. Both organizations initiated a media campaign for combating the corruption, and launched a plethora of projects. The programs “Europe”, “Democracy” and “Civil Society”, sponsored by the European Union, also granted important funds to several NGO projects, designed at combating corruption. The involvement of foreign institutions was not restricted to support of local NGOs. The USAID had initiated a specific program, implemented by its own staff, for reforming the justice system and combating the corruption. More important, foreign politicians do not hesitate to approach directly the corruption issues in Bulgaria. The US ambassador to Bulgaria, Mr. James Pardue made an official statement in January 2003 that the corruption in Bulgaria is one of most important obstacles that might prevent the accession of the country to NATO. He was echoed in July 2003 by Mr. Günter Ferheugen who, during his visit in Sofia, singled out the corruption and the justice system as the most important potential obstacles to our accession to EU. Last but not least, an international conference took place in Sofia on September 5, 2003, when ministers of all the Balkan countries gathered under the auspices of the Stability Pact. This time the corruption was singled out as one of the most important potential threats for the stability of the region, alongside with the ethnic tensions and crime networks. Thus the corruption was plainly interpreted as a security threat. Foreign policy priorities, economic prosperity, stability of the region – a variety of international institutions officially related the corruption to these extremely important issues, and invested in local NGOs and media programs dealing with the problem.

All these factors helped putting the corruption at the center of the debates in Bulgaria. They combined with an impressive societal pressure in Bulgaria, as a set of recent surveys indicate. It seems that the surprising electoral victory of NMSS and Mr. Saxe-Coburg-Gotha provoked a considerable turmoil amongst the think tanks and political analysts in Bulgaria. This could explain why three think tanks with different background and political affiliation, launched almost simultaneously major research projects to investigate the current agenda of the Bulgarian society and its political behavior. The final product were three reports, “The Language of the Left”, published by the Institute for Social Democracy in June 2002, the “Bulgarian 21 (century)”, published by the Center for Social Practices also in June 2002, and the “State of Society”, published by Open Society Foundation in September 2002. My further argument will be based on these reports.

Despite the different political orientation of these think tanks and the different methodologies their use, all the reports agree in several points. All of them reach a similar conclusion – that the old oppositions between left and right, former communists and anti-communists, oppositions that divided the Bulgarian society in early 1990s, have disappeared. The ethnic divisions, which were to be expected in any Balkan society, were no more relevant. Instead, a major opposition has emerged – that between us, the normal, humble people, and them, the elite, defined as politicians, Mafiosi and businessmen. The former were defined as losers of the changes since 1989, while the latter were defined as winners. The most common explanation why some people gained from the changes and other lost, was the corruption. Another observation, presented in all the reports, was that the average citizens do not understand the process of decision making neither in the political parties, supposed to represent him, nor in the government. The decisions on specific items, directly related to the everyday life, as for example the tax policy and prices of services provided by the state monopolies, were not explained to the citizens, they used to come all of a sudden, unexpected, unexplained, terrifying. Lacking an official explanation and in a situation where a public debate was lacking, the individuals had to construct an interpretation ad hoc, and corruption provided an excellent option. The three reports indicate most of the Bulgarian society now is failing to understand the logic of extremely important processes. The first one is the growing inequality in a society that was held in state of enforced homogeneity for several decades. When no other plausible explanation was offered, the corruption discourses provided a good solution. In a similar motion, the political actors failed to explain their decisions and the functioning of the government and the administration lacked transparency, efficiency and effectiveness.

To explain their decisions, the average citizen had to recur again to the corruption discourses. These discourses had several advantages from his point of view – they take into account the very lack of transparency and build upon it (by definition, the corruption acts are carried out in dark); they offer a morally sound excuse for personal failures (one can claim that he failed to become rich because of his constant refusal to take part into shadow dealings) and they offer a good pretext to blame the rich and powerful.

Thus, three tendencies of different origin combined. Each one of them followed a different logic. The local political actors needed a new agenda after 1997, when the main framework of the domestic and foreign policy was constituted. The Bulgarian citizens needed a plausible interpretation of major process it was undergoing, while the foreign investors lobbied for fair

play and the EU and World Bank wanted to guarantee a better use of their grants. Each of these actors had a different understanding of the notion of corruption and followed a different agenda, but the combination of all of them guaranteed a dominant position of the corruption discourses in contemporary Bulgaria. An impressive support staff, designing and proliferating anticorruption discourse, emerged. The anticorruption in Central and Eastern Europe has become an industry, whose turnover is evaluated by Bryane Michael at 100 millions of USD per year, a quickly growing and extremely competitive industry, which has created its own professionals.

International institutions, businesses, and NGOs, local NGOs and political parties – the very variety of actors producing anticorruption discourses largely precludes any successful effort to stop the production and propagation of anticorruption discourses. Each of them has its own sources of financing, its own priorities, and its anticorruption activities follow a particular logic. The withdrawal of a group donors or institutions, e.g. the international institutions, would probably change the balance in the current chorus, and might provoke a shift in the accents of the anticorruption rhetoric, but would not stop the campaigns. They will continue regardless of their unexpected consequences they have on the public opinion. Thus the main negative effects of anticorruption campaigns, indicated by Krastev and Ganev, will probably remain. The withdrawal of some actors will not make the anticorruption industry less harmful.

Looking for new partners

In their recent assessment of the anticorruption tools used in South-Eastern Europe, Martin Tisne and Daniel Smilov analyze some tools for finding a way out of what they call ‘the cynicism trap’ and for reviving the citizens’ interest in corruption issues, which would reduce the negative side effects of the campaigns. One option is to become more specific. The NGOs and the large public coalitions have reached their limits, Tisne and Smilov argue, and the networks of people interested in solving a specific problem might be a more efficient instrument.

Another option is to look for new partners. As far as the general public support is concerned, the political parties have proven their capacity to mobilize large social groups. Regardless of the initial intentions of the international organizations to present the corruption as an apolitical issue, the citizens largely interpret it as a political problem, the party leaderships generously

use anticorruption rhetoric, so the political parties are a logical partner for fighting the corruption. Other potential partners are the trade unions and the professional organizations. The account of the public scandals that follows might advance our understanding of how a campaign, focused on a specific issue, could mobilize public support in Bulgaria, and indicate some limitations of the existing organizations as potential partners.

II. Three case studies

I. Is a public scandal possible in a village

The lines of division

The village Trud⁶ is situated in North-Western Bulgaria, near Danube river, some 30 km. from Lom. It has 1014 inhabitants, some 430 of them being of Roma origin, approximately 560 ethnic Bulgarians and three Turkish families which recently moved to the village from South-Western Bulgaria.

The ethnic Bulgarian community consists mainly of elderly people, whose children have migrated to the towns. Only 30 of them are under 45 and there are no children of ethnic Bulgarian origin in the local school. On the other side, the ethnic Roma community is rather young, both because of the relatively early mortality, and the higher birth ratio. Some 90 children study at the local school, three of them are of Turkish origin, and the rest are Roma. Despite the high presence of Roma children in the school, only two young Roma have graduated from high school and no one has university education. On the other had, most of the ethnic Bulgarians have graduated from general or specialized high schools, and 6 persons have university education.

Besides the age structure, the two communities have different occupations. All the Bulgarian families have more or less land - the size of the plots varying between 40 and 350 da per family, where the Roma generally do not own land (with the exception of one enlarged family). This is due to several reasons - the landowners before the collectivization of 1950s

⁶ The names of two localities, Trud and Sreden, are changed to preserve the anonymity of informants.

were mostly ethnic Bulgarians and the land was restituted after 1991 to their heirs; the landowners generally refuse to sell their land; the Roma families generally refuse to participate in the land distribution schemes, promoted by the local municipality, because they will not be entitled to the main welfare schemes afterwards.

All the ethnic Bulgarian families are involved in agriculture. A couple of them are officially registered as farmers and practice large-scale agriculture, specializing mostly in crops (wheat, barley, maize) and sunflower, while the rest are small-scale farmers and their production goes mostly for their personal and their children's consumption. The small farmers also sell part of their production, mostly milk, vegetables and other labor-intensive cultures. The Roma do not own land. Sometimes they are employed by the local rural entrepreneurs, but since the latter ones specialize in crops, most of the work is done by machines and extra hands are needed only sporadically. More often they are employed by the small farmers during the summer and are paid in kind and/or in cash, the fees varying between 5 and 9 BGL, depending on the difficulty of the work and the additional payment in kind (food, clothes).

The main source of income for the ethnic Bulgarians are pensions and, to a lesser extent, salaries and revenues from agriculture. The main source of income for the Roma are welfare payments, and to a lesser degree pensions, salaries, entrepreneurship, agriculture and informal payments from ethnic Bulgarian farmers. Only two ethnic Roma have permanent formal employment - one in the village administration, and another as a cleaning woman in the school. A Roma family are self-employed, they own the village 'kazan' - the installation where the villagers brew their rakia, a strong alcoholic beverage.

Finally, the two communities are spatially segregated. Most of the Roma are concentrated in a district in the southern part of the village, called Roma mahala, or simply 'the mahala', *mahalata*, thickly peopled, where several persons, and in most of the cases, several families, live in each house. The rest of the village belongs to the ethnic Bulgarians, and most of the houses are inhabited by elderly couples or widows. However, several Roma families moved to empty house in other areas of the village.

The village is split between two clearly distinctive communities. The differences between them are not only ethnic, cultural and linguistic, but also in income, education, occupation, employment, and property patterns. Each of them reinforces the division line and makes it more difficult to overcome. The small Turkish community represents some of the characteristics of each of two main groups - its age structure and education level are closer to that of the Roma, but its sources of income, occupation, and employment patterns remain

closer to the ethnic Bulgarians. Generally, the Turks remain outside the village politics and are not involved in the conflicts and scandals that will be discussed further.

Of course, neither the ethnic Bulgarians, nor the Roma are homogeneous groups, there certainly exist internal divisions and conflicts inside each community, but it seems that at a specific moment the internal divisions were obliterated and became relatively irrelevant.

The conflicts

There is an open hostility between these communities, including physical and verbal violence and two murder cases. The tensions are generated by three main topics - thefts, employment, and welfare payments.

The thefts are by far the most important one. Practically each ethnic Bulgarian informant insisted on telling me several cases when his agricultural production or livestock, was stolen, blaming the inhabitants of the mahala (the village district, inhabited by Roma). The informants claimed that practically each Bulgarian household has suffered from such razzias. However, most of them were unable to quote specific examples of thefts in their own household.

The Roma informants generally did not refute the accusations, but introduced some important details. Most of the interviewed Roma agreed that the perpetrators of the petty thefts are to be sought in Roma mahala. On the other side, they said, the authors of bigger crimes are among the ethnic Bulgarians - namely the rural entrepreneurs, who pay a fraction of the real price for the labor of their Roma employees; the former village nomenclature, which profited most from the privatization; the president of the cooperative farm and his entourage, who successfully maneuvered the farm to bankruptcy, etc. The main message was that both parties of the village are guilty, but in a different way. The inhabitants of the mahala earn less from their illicit actions, while they are more likely to be punished. Only the president of the cooperative farm was tried, but received no sentence, while many inhabitants of the mahala served prison terms. All these mutual accusations and self-justifications are quite standard and might be encountered in many locations. More interesting in our case is the distinction drawn by the villagers between the theft of private property and the theft of cooperative or state property. The latter one is considered less harmful and usually does not provoke retaliation. The few border cases, when it was not clear where the stolen property was private or not, provoked serious debates in the village. One of these cases was when a night watch, an ethnic Bulgarian, was caught to steal tractor tires from the newly established small cooperative farm.

Most of the villagers claimed that the new farm was totally different from the old socialist cooperative, because only the few people who created it, invested their own money, land and efforts, and will suffer personally from the theft. That is why even the relatives of the night watch did not blame the owners who brought the thief to justice (the young man did not receive an effective sentence). The second case was more serious, when an old ethnic Bulgarian caught a young Roma last summer while stealing electric wires. The men quarreled, the young man claiming that it was not old Bulgarian's business, because the wires are not his property, while the old man arguing that the wires provide electricity to several local households, therefore their inhabitants have a legitimate reason to intervene. Finally, the young one struck the elderly fellow and the latter one passed away in a few days. This is an extreme example, but it refers to the important issue of the ownership of the village as a settlement and community. The ethnic Bulgarians generally consider themselves the legitimate owners, while the inhabitants of the mahala usually reject any ownership claim for the whole settlement, whatever its source might be.

Employment is another major source of disputes. The municipal administration, the local school, the new cooperative farm, and the two rural entrepreneurs are the only employers in the village. Practically all the positions available, with two exceptions, are occupied by ethnic Bulgarians - both because they have the relevant educational background, or at least the necessary diploma, and because of their domination in the village networks. That is why practically all the ethnic Bulgarians who are not pensioners have a job, good or not so good. The few positions available are jealously controlled and one of the major disputes in the village emerged when the leader of the most influential Roma family in the village offered a bargain to the candidates for mayor; he promised the support of the mahala at the votes, if his daughter, who has high school education, was employed in the municipality. The offer was refused, because it would mean the loss of several ethnic Bulgarian votes.

Another major topic for dissatisfaction are the welfare payments. Most of the ethnic Bulgarians in the village are pensioners and they have a clear understanding that they compete with the inhabitants of the mahala for the same resources, "the money from the state". One of the main topics of the everyday discussions are the pensions, the small amount of money received, and the lack of justice when one receives the equivalent of 60 USD per month after 40 years of work (the salaries of the workers at the socialist cooperative farms were probably the lowest before 1989, and so are their pensions). The discussion usually ends with a comparison between the money received by the pensioners, and the welfare payments

received by their Roma neighbors. The amounts of money do not differ much, and the elderly people consider this situation as deeply unfair.

The most serious current dispute was related to the program 'From welfare payments to employment', introduced by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The aim of the program is to support long-term unemployed people recovering their basic labor skills and making them more competitive at the labor market, by subsidizing temporary job positions. As far as the village was concerned, the municipality was identified as the sole potential employer, while it turned out that nobody outside the Roma community was entitled to the program - the ethnic Bulgarians were either pensioners, or had land and job. Thus the municipality employed Roma for public works, mostly cleaning village streets and sewage system, repairing village infrastructure, etc. The program fuelled the conflict in the village, most of the ethnic Bulgarians interpreting it as yet another device for spending state money for the Roma, while my Roma informants often complained that it is mostly the Bulgarian part of the village which profits from the works, commissioned by the municipality - the Roma mahala is relatively isolated at the outskirts of the village, while the works are concentrated mostly in the central parts, where live only ethnic Bulgarians.

Introducing the concept of corruption and the start of a public scandal

Both communities regularly refer to the concept of corruption when analyzing their mutual relations; and both of them use it for explaining the dissatisfactory way of how the institutions are functioning.

Several ethnic Bulgarians regularly explain by corruption the fact that the relevant institutions are unable or unwilling to stop the thefts. According to them, both police and justice refuse to be bothered with the small problems of a small village, because the villagers are unable to offer them any financial incentives. 'When something is stolen from Meto (a local rural entrepreneur), he will turn the earth till he finds the culprit, and he will not let the police staying idle. He pays regularly all the police bosses; he drinks with them, so the sergeant knows that he should move. When something is stolen from an old lady, she will cry and the sergeant might act just in order to get rid of her. When something is stolen from the village, nobody would say anything and the sergeant would not bother.' explained one informant the different degrees of involvement of the police. The general presumption was that the people, representing the institutions, should have some personal motivation to act.

In their turn, the Roma used the concept of corruption to explain the fact that several relatives of them were actually caught by the police and received effective sentences, while no ethnic Bulgarian served a term in the prison. 'If you steal a chicken, you will not have enough neither for you, nor for the police. If you steal a lot of money, there will be enough both for you and for the police.', explained a Roma informant when I asked him for a glossa of the popular song 'There is no mercy for a chicken (if you steal it), there is no justice for a million'.

Several ethnic Bulgarians also explain the unfair, as they conceive it, distribution of the welfare money also by corruption. According to them, the mayor had a soft spot for the Roma community, because they voices decide the elections. The ethnic Bulgarian voters were divided in two relatively equal parts, and it was up to the Roma voters to decide who will be the winner.

Three interesting details attract attention at this stage.

- The informants were unable to quote real examples of corruption practices, when real transactions took place.
- Second, they regularly referred to corruption when trying to explain why some institutions do not function as they expect them to do.
- Third, the concept of corruption helped them to analyze the (poor) functioning and efficiency of the institutions in human, personal and therefore easily understandable terms. It seems that the concept of corruption was actively used as a tool for thinking and analyzing the institutions.

The specific case which triggered the scandal was the theft of three sheep and a goat from a villager. The police was unable to identify the culprit, and refused to investigate the case further. The driving force of the scandal was a group of middle-aged women, who have been gathering for years in the local House of Culture (Chitaliste). Initially most of them belonged to a folk songs ensemble, but latter the same group began inviting professional lecturers to hold talks about issues important for the village, e.g. agronomy, human and veterinary doctors, etc. An important detail is that most of the members of the group did not suffer personally from thefts. The women decided to invite the director of the regional police station to hold a talk about the best strategies for preventing the thefts. The talk was major event for the village, because several dozens, maybe even hundreds, of villagers gathered - more than the hall of the House of Culture was able to hold, and many times more than for any other talk. According to the latter accounts, the policeman was practically unable to speak, because

the villagers kept shouting questions and latter, open insults at him. The fellow left the hall quite angry and accused the women of involving him in a 'provocation'.

The group of women who organized the talk were also surprised by the reaction of the villagers, and decided to keep the momentum. At this stage some members ceased to play an important part, while new ones joined. They organized a petition, signed by more than three hundred ethnic Bulgarian inhabitants in the village. The petition was 'against the Roma' and presented a description of the thefts committed in the village and attributed to the Roma. Three village women and a man brought this document to a prosecutor in Montana, asking her 'to do something'. According to my informants, the prosecutor answered that the request should be more specific, and a second petition was prepared and signed, this time pleading for a forced expulsion of all the Roma from the village. The steering committee, which was joined meanwhile by local men of influence, sought contact with policemen, prosecutors and 'authorities' to present the petition, but always were answered that the contacted person is not competent to discuss the problem. However, the official usually tried to calm the villagers and advised them to cancel the petition. The steering committee contacted also a non-governmental organization, specialized in ethnic issues, which was implementing an educational project in a neighboring village. The petition was mentioned in the local media in Lom and Montana.

At this stage it seemed that all the ingredients for a large public scandal are available

- **a small and active group, resolved to press the issue;**
- **a community ready to support them;**
- **a clear understanding among the main actors that the institutions will not act as they expect them to do, so they should look for support from elsewhere, and**
- **an issue which goes beyond the mere conflicts between neighbors and provoked the interest of the media.**

The public scandal was launched, the question was how far it might go.

Then, all of a sudden, the steering committee decided to drop the issue. Here the accounts of all my informers do not differ much. According to them, the villagers realized that the issue at stake is too important, too far-reaching, going well beyond the scope of their village. The authorities they contacted reminded them that the thefts are not a problem restricted to their village, and that the solutions also can not be restricted to one single settlement. The local mayor, who never supported the petition, meanwhile kept explaining the villagers that the

distribution of the welfare payments does not depend of him, but is a state policy. The villagers always knew that the thefts are a problem common for the whole area, if not for the whole country, but the new contacts and activities helped them understand several dimensions of the problem which they neglected before. 'That is how the things go. We cannot change the whole country', explained Maria, the undisputed leader of the steering committee.

The scandal died away precisely at the moment when it went beyond the boundaries of the village, and when the main actors realized that the issues at stake, solutions sought, and protests voiced are of national, not of local importance.

2. Common Interest and Individual Interests

A town at a crossroad

The second locality where I did fieldwork, was Sreden, a town of some 8823 inhabitants in Southern Bulgaria, Plovdiv region. The town has a rather dynamic demographic balance. Approximately 40% of its inhabitants are Muslims of Turkish, Pomak (Bulgarian speaking Muslims) or Roma origin. Some 2000 ethnic Turks left it during the great exodus in 1980s, but a similar number of Pomaks moved to the town in the last decades, thus making the presence of the Muslim community relatively stable. The newcomers were generally young, in their late teens or twenties, thus compensating for the outflow of young ethnic Bulgarians who migrated to study and work in larger towns and cities. The Pomaks came from several villages in Rodopi mountains. Sreden was the nearest town with a large Muslim community, that is why they preferred to settle there instead of Perustitza or Bratzigovo. As they explained, Sreden was 'the first town with a mosque'.

The town has an impressive history as crossroad and transport center, and a significant part of its economy depended on it. It remains a place where people are permanently moving and commuting. Part of the inhabitants work in Plovdiv and commute every day. Others move between the town and the neighboring villages, where they were born and where they go on weekends to help with the farming. Still others are residents of larger towns, but regularly return to Sreden to visit their parents and relatives.

Most of the inhabitants are more or less involved in agricultural activities, but in a different way. The area around the town is reputed for its apples, and some 200 farmers are officially registered as apple producers. Several rural entrepreneurs invested recently in strawberry and blackberry production, relying on the cheap labor in the area. Besides the commercial farmers, several households in the town cultivate their house garden, sometimes quite large, up to 0.15 ha, and produce vegetables for their own consumption and for the market. As a rule, the latter ones are old residents of Sreden, the newcomers usually being unable to afford a house with large yard in the town. The newcomers get all the vegetables they need for their own consumption on the market.

A common problem and a variety of coping strategies

All the inhabitants of the town have to face a common problem - the lack of water. Actually, a relatively large river flows amidst the town. It collects the water from several subsidiaries in Rodopi mountains and has a relatively stable debit throughout the whole year. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Sreden, the river is also the main source of water for a series of three artificial lakes and the corresponding electrical power plants. Both the power plants and the artificial lakes are controlled by the Ministry of Energy, which has its own logic. Generally, it prefers to hold the water during the summer, when the energy consumption in the country is relatively low. The energy consumption rises in the cold winter months and when the needs are at maximum, the input of all the power plants is badly needed and it is then and only then when it willingly releases the precious water. Then the river starts filling the artificial lakes again till the next season. The problem is that the energy consumption in the country is lowest precisely in the months when the water is most needed for the agriculture. Each summer the municipality and the mayor launch an intensive exchange of letters, telephone calls and visits with the ministry of Energy and the management of the power plant, asking for some water. As a rule, the pleads are answered after a long delay, if at all, and the amount of water allowed is far from sufficient. It seems that the problem is related not only to a lack of good will from the Ministry of Energy. When the dam was planned, the level of the underground waters in the area was higher and the hydro-engineers calculated that the town could rely on them for its own needs. Unfortunately, the level of the underground waters dramatically diminished when the river was captured in the artificial lake. Meanwhile, the doors of the dam was constructed to allow either a large flow of water, or not at all. When the dam had to open its gates during the last summer, when the water began to brim over the dam wall, the

minimum they could manage, was 160 liters per second (instead of the recommended 40 liters). In practical terms it means that Sreden has either more water than it needs, or not at all.

The whole population of Sreden is affected by the lack of water. For the apple producers, this is one of the most serious problems they have to face. They can get water from three main sources: municipality, Irrigation Systems Ltd, and private wells. The municipality controls part of the local irrigation system, and sometimes it manages to persuade the management of the artificial lake to open the dam doors and let some water in it. Each plot of apple trees is related to the main irrigation system through small channels, dug by the farmers. While the main system is permanent, the small channels are constructed and reconstructed by the farmers each time. The amount of water which might flow through them and its direction is controlled by digging deeper or by barring parts of the channel, thus allowing each apple tree, even those which are at relatively high places, receive its share. He should work very quickly, because the flow goes between 15 and 30 minutes; the farmer has to run practically all the time. The municipality receives a minimal tax. This is by far the best option, both cheapest and honest. However, it is also a permanent source of conflicts. The best time for watering is during the night, but it is also the time when it is easiest to steal the water of your neighbor. According to my informants, it is quite common for a farmer to go till the end of his plot, running, digging and closing parts of the channel, watering one tree after another, and to notice that his neighbor had meanwhile dug a small link to his plot. The theft is practically impossible to notice in the night, unless the culprit is caught while acting, and a good half of the water could be stolen that way. The stories about thieves caught and neighbors fighting enliven the local chronicles each summer. My informants claim that such crimes are usually committed by elderly men and that they start fights more often. The explanations vary between respect of force (the young men not fighting, because they are stronger and real harm might occur), agility (young men are more difficult to catch), and laziness (they have better to do in the evenings). Whatever it might be, the conflicts are serious and present one of the rare occasions when grown-up people regularly recur to physical violence.

Another option is to pay the Irrigation Systems Ltd. Most of the old irrigation system was privatized and became a business society whose main activity is providing water for the farmers. The prices requested by the Irrigation Systems are several times higher than the municipal ones, but often they are the only option available. The last option is to dig a well, and to water the plot with an electrical pump. This is strictly forbidden by the municipality,

because the underground waters are too shallow anyway, and their use for irrigation would leave the town without water at all. However, it is quite difficult to control whether a well is used or not, especially in the night.

Each option provides some opportunities for corruption. The farmers might recur to it when trying to convince the municipal inspectors that they do not use illegally their wells. They might pay some extra money to the staff of Irrigation System Ltd and to receive more water than the official receipt says, and much cheaper than the price fixed by the owners of the company. Finally, they might use it as an argument that the municipality should provide cheap water when the apple producers need it and not, say, when it will benefit mostly the strawberries.

The urban dwellers also are seriously affected. The lack of water is a serious problem for the inhabitants of Sreden who cultivate their garden plots. According to my informants, even a relatively small plot of 80 m² could produce enough vegetables to answer all the needs of a family during most of the year. Some yards are far more significant, reaching up to 1000 square meters. Potentially, they are extremely fertile and the owners could easily protect the production from thefts, something which is one of the main obstacles for intensive agriculture outside the town. The temptation to use these yards for market production, is really serious, and quite a few owners could not resist it. The only obstacle is the water. Most of the wells inside the town are sealed and it is absolutely forbidden to put a well with electric pump. The delinquents are relatively easy to catch, despite the fact that sometimes they are quite ingenuous - for example, one of them had constructed a whole underground channel to one of the main pipelines in the town, and was caught only by chance. However, the water inspectors can easily notice the difference between a well irrigated garden and a dry one, and after identifying a potential culprit, they start looking for proofs. That is why most of the gardeners have to rely on more standard sources. It is formally forbidden by the municipality to use potable water for irrigation, but the inhabitants regularly disregard the prohibition, and water their garden plots with potable water. It seems that this is the general rule, and a walk in the central parts of Sreden even in the hottest months, usually displays a pleasant sight of yards flourishing with well maintained green vegetation, flowers, and vegetables. The municipality perfectly realizes the situation and even expects the citizens to act so. According to a deputy mayor, the aim of the prohibition was to prevent using potable water for commercial agriculture. The water inspectors are expected to close their eyes when only a small garden for private use is watered, and to prevent only the massive use of water by people who sell

their production. Local authorities, water inspectors, and citizens perfectly know of this tacit understanding. The latter ones regularly test its limits, and a major part of the working day of the water inspectors is usually spent in discussions with customers pleading that they have a large family, including children and grand-children living in other towns, so the vegetables will not go to the market; or that the vegetables in their garden are of a very special, modern and progressive sort, newly selected in Europe or the USA, which does not require much water. In the most flagrant cases the water inspectors try to catch the delinquents while watering their gardens, and prepare carefully planned operations. Of course, they are not always successful. There are several dozens of splendid gardens inside the town, whose owners remain unpunished, and which raise speculations and accusations of corruption. Unlike the case with the apple producers, who gladly admit bribing the staff of the Irrigation Systems Ltd, it is difficult to verify if there were real money transactions between garden owners and water inspectors, or if the garden owners were just too smart to be caught. Whatever it might be, a delicate balance emerged between garden owners, municipality, and water inspectors, establishing the tacit terms of the prohibition and when it might be disregarded. This balance was challenged in the recent months by a new water inspector, who intended to apply the rules in full. The municipality was rather unhappy with him, because he challenged a delicate tacit understanding which took several years to construct. The large yard owners were openly hostile, but the inspector enjoyed the full support of his superiors, and, unlike some colleagues of his, enjoyed a reputation of total integrity, so he was rather difficult to be stopped. The new tax inspector was Bulgarian Muslim and belonged to a family which had moved to Sreden relatively recently, which made the conflict even more interesting, because not all the inhabitants of the town were affected by the lack of water in the same way.

The agriculture inside the borders of the town was a privilege for the old families, which lived in the central parts of Sreden for generations. They belong mostly to ethnic Bulgarian and Turkish families and only they have houses with large yards and garden plots.

On the other side, a significant part of the urban dwellers is concentrated in huge concrete buildings, constructed in 1970s and 1980s, when the town developed as an industrial center. Some inhabitants of these buildings are industrial workers, who commute to Plovdiv. Others are Pomaks who moved recently to the town and were able to afford only a small and poorly isolated in the ugly concrete constructions remaining from the socialist period. These are the poor parts of the town. The inhabitants of these areas are quite unhappy with the regular water shortages in the summer, when sometimes the water supply stops for several days in a row.

They face basic hygienic problems, and so do the businesses and institutions located there. For example, the kindergartens could not function in the dry periods, when the dishes cannot be washed and the sanitary facilities cleaned. For people commuting every working day to another town, the closure of the kindergarten is a major problem. It is amongst the inhabitants of the concrete buildings that the rumors about corrupt water inspectors and municipal servants flourished most, and they generally refused to accept the tacit understanding adopted in the central parts of the town. The incorruptible water inspector came precisely from that part of the town, and was perceived as their champion against the more affluent families living in the central parts.

On the other side, the inhabitants both of the central and the peripheral parts of Sreden were angry at the apple and strawberry producers, and accuse them of accessing illegally the shallow underground waters and of inventing a variety of ways to bypass the official seals locking the wells.

A failed public scandal

The list of those affected by the water shortage might be continued almost indefinitely, including for example shepherds and cattle breeders, the unlucky businessmen who invested in fish ponds near the town, restaurant and coffee shop owners, etc. etc. However, to the best of my knowledge, it was only one small group which tried to mobilize popular support for solving the water problem, namely the local hunting club. The water shortage was a major disaster for its members, because their favorite prey, the wild ducks, left the dry river bed, the larger animals also moved away, while fish and crabs disappeared. Most of the members of the hunting club were quite influential people, including businessmen, civil servants and politicians, and their campaign was organized with skill and imagination. Their strategy was based on displaying the disastrous ecological consequences of the draught. This choice had several advantages - the ecology was an issue going beyond the interests of any particular group, it was directly related to the common good of the whole town. Moreover, it allowed the steering committee to play one major institution against another, and to build pressure on the power plant management and the Ministry of Energy with the help of the Ministry of Ecology. Most of the members of the hunting club participated only in the initial discussions, but latter the steering committee was joined by new people, mostly politicians, who took the relay. Even the minister of ecology, Mrs. Dolores Arsenova, visited the town and urged for a

quick solution of the ecological crisis, powerful institutions were set in motion, the management of the artificial lake had to pay a small fine, and the 'Water Basins' Directorate ordered it to provide on a regular basis the amount of water necessary for maintaining the ecological balance in the area. The management paid the fine, but forgot about the water and the whole issue was dropped in a few weeks.

The parallels with Trud are obvious

- an issue relevant for the whole community or at least for very significant part of it;
- a small and very active group ready to press the issue,
- in both cases this group was relatively marginal for community everyday life and politics, both legitimately concerned with the issue and not important enough to dominate the local conflicts; there was also
- a general dissatisfaction with the way how an institution functions (in this case, the Ministry of Energy and the management of the artificial lake).

The similarities end here. Despite the fact that the local media (newspaper and municipal radio station) provided an extensive coverage of the efforts of the hunting club, it seems that the citizens did not pay much attention. Only a few of them gathered to see the minister of ecology, and no other group tried to combine its efforts with those of the hunting club. The inhabitants of Sreden perfectly realized that more water in the river would mean more water for irrigation, higher underground waters and end of the water shortages inside the town, but remained passive. The issue at stake affected each of them more or less, but the level of their mobilization was far more modest than in Trud village, where the steering committee organized a huge rally and gathered several dozens of signatures under their petitions.

There are some interesting **structural differences** between the situation in Trud and Sreden.

Both in Trud and Sreden several social groups and categories were affected by the common problem, but in the second case each of them was affected in a different way.

Instead of the massive opposition in the village, where several division lines (ethnicity, education, property patterns, age structure, income, etc.) were overlapping, in Sreden a variety of social actors were affected in different degrees.

Second, there were several everyday situations when the social actors were competing with the rest for a limited resource, the water.

Third, **a variety of individual coping strategies was available** and the local actors resorted to them with more or less success in Sreden, while in Trud this option was closed. The villagers were pushed to a common action when they considered that all the individual exits were closed. When explaining why they signed the petition, most of the informants insisted that this was a last recourse and that they have tried individually several other options before.

Forth, **it seems that in Sreden there were real transactions** - almost certainly for apple and strawberry producers, and quite probable for urban gardeners. However, the informants usually **interpreted them as an integral part of a range of more or less honorable individual coping strategies**, starting from cultivating sorts which demand less water, and finishing with opening sealed wells, manipulating the water meters, and stealing from thy neighbor.

While in Trud the corruption was mostly an intellectual tool for personalizing and explaining the functioning of the institutions, in Sreden it was an individual coping strategy. The people most concerned with the corruption were the inhabitants of the periphery, which were not interested in maintaining the delicate balance between farmers, municipal authorities, and water inspectors or water managers.

The citizens of Sreden immediately associated the steering committee, the local hunting club, with a particular group, the inhabitants of the central parts of the town and the large farmers, a group which competed with other social groups in the town, and with a particular set of interests. The inhabitants of the peripheral parts of the town did not accept the steering committee's claim to represent the interests of the whole community (most of the members of the hunting club live in the downtown), while those from the central parts were quite satisfied with the tacit understandings regarding the use of potable water for irrigation, and preferred to avoid a large public exposure of the issue. The farmers were largely suspicious towards the ecological arguments used by the steering committee (according to them, several cheap and efficient fertilizers and plant protection chemicals were withdrawn from the market as harmful to the ecosystem), and were generally alarmed that a third category of water might be introduced, water for ecosystem needs, besides the water for irrigation and the water for household needs, a third category that would split part of the already scarce resource.

The small and active network, which constituted itself as a steering committee, was suspected of partiality and failed to mobilize public support.

3. Scandal's ownership problems

The capital town of Sofia offers a variety of opportunities to study corruption scandals. I focused only on one scandal, related to real estate, first because there is a running set of official investigations against the mayor of Sofia for mishandling of municipal property, and second because most of the cases of public protest against the presumed corruption in the town, were related to the use of plots of land, sold by the municipality to undertakers and investors.

It seems that the discussions about the municipal real property attract the public attention because of an interesting combination of motives.

Most of the inhabitants of Sofia own the flat or house they live in. According to some surveys, almost 90% of the families live in their own lodging. It was a tradition established during the socialist period, and most of the young families try to stick to it. Another tradition is to live for a long period, even for generations, in the same lodging. Despite all the ups and downs in their personal wellbeing, the inhabitants of Sofia generally avoid changing their residence. This specificity of the situation in Sofia and Bulgaria has several consequences regarding the public scandals. The fact that they own some real property and perfectly know how much does it cost, allowed my informants to make a comparison between their own situation and the presumed benefits of those who mishandled the municipal real property. They were able to grasp immediately the size and the consequences of the actions of the municipality, and to evaluate the earnings of the presumed culprits.

Second, in several cases the decisions of the municipality to sell parts of public gardens or facilities to undertakers who constructed there gas stations or apartment blocks, immediately deteriorated the quality of life in the neighborhood. The informants conceived this as a common problem without any options for individual coping strategies and escapes.

Third, all the people living in the neighborhood, regardless of their social background and interests, were affected in the same way by the decision. No one of my informants considered seriously the opportunity to move to another district of Sofia.

Thus the situation with public scandals related to municipal real estate had some common characteristics with the scandal in Trud village.

The issues related to mishandling of municipal property are a privileged topic also for the media. Besides reflecting the interest of the citizens (and customers), it seems that the misuse of real estate has two major advantages from a media point of view - the object remains stable and easily identifiable for a long period of time, which helps the journalists keeping the

attention of the public for several weeks and months in a row, and allows enough time span for a lengthy journalistic investigation. In other cases, the fact that the object of mishandling is easily identifiable, stable and with an undeniable presence, permits the media to do exactly the opposite, and to skip the real investigation. The building, the garden, are presented as argument per se. A recent report by Access foundation indicated that the bulk of the publications related to corruption, do not present any arguments and evidence. The very materiality of the real estate helps obscuring this handicap.

Most of my fieldwork in Sofia was focused on investigating the public protests against the construction of a gas station in Belite Brezi district. A small public garden near one of the main roads in Sofia was restituted to the previous owners of the land, who sold it to a private investor. The municipality permitted the conversion of the public garden to a gas station and shopping area. A small group of people living in the neighboring area, mostly in their late middle age or older, organized a public petition against the conversion and sent it to a variety of institutions and media. The construction was postponed for several months, under a general prohibition of construction of new gas stations, proclaimed by the municipality. After the local elections, the construction works began. A new petition was organized, with several hundred signatures, and when it failed to achieve visible results, the steering committee organized public protests. Two times the protesters stopped the traffic of the main road. The event immediately attracted the attention of the media, who liked especially the slogans against the mayor, who was accused of corruption and whose name was converted from Sofianski to 'Mafianski'. The mayor indeed was the privileged target of the protests. Consequently, several institutions took interest in the case, including the office of the prosecutor general and the parliament. The prosecution was unable to find any evidence for corruption transactions. The Parliament officially recommended the municipality to stop the construction works, and received a short and negative answer. It seems that the deal was perfect from a legal point of view and despite the obvious goodwill of the Parliament, it was impossible to challenge it in the court. Opposition political parties also took interest in the case, and related it to the general functioning of the institutions, the government, and the general problems of the contemporary Bulgarian society. Representatives of the governing coalition related the case with the way how the municipality is run, the mayor being leader of another party.

It was precisely at the moment when the media and the institutions reacted to the public interest and became involved in the case, when the scandal began losing its momentum. It

seems that a clear negative correlation emerged between the readiness of my informants to act, and the scope of the problems which were discussed. When the media, the institutions, and the political parties began arguing that the real issues at stake are going far beyond the local interests, and that are related to general problems of the country and the society - and they could not act otherwise - the local inhabitants began losing their interest in public protests and action.

The participants in the public protests were mobilized at a local basis, facing a problem that affected all the inhabitants of the area in the same way, regardless of the social profile (the way how the car owners reacted did not differ from that of pedestrians), and no options for individual escapes and coping strategies being left. The steering committee was not related with any institution, party, or NGO, and was organized ad hoc. The citizens mobilized in that way began to disband when the issue at stake reached a national dimension, when institutions of national importance became involved, and when the problems discussed reached issues like the state of the Bulgarian society.

The massive involvement of the media coincided with a change of the ownership of the scandal. At this stage, the political parties competing with the Sofia mayor increased their activity and began voicing the protests of the citizens. **The participants in the public protest reacted quite negatively to the efforts of different political parties to join in, and to present the local action as a protest against the way how the municipality, and/or government, and/or society works.**

4. Common tendencies

Four main tendencies could be identified in these case studies.

First, it might be argued that the social actors tend to prefer individual coping strategies to the public action. In practical terms, it means that **there is potential for public scandal mainly when the chance to find individual exits, coping strategies and solutions, is minimal**. As far as the corruption is concerned, the real corruption transactions are often conceived as part of the coping strategies, which means that those who are involved in them, including the injured party, are not very probable to join a public protest.

Second, it seems that **the potential for public action is greater when all the social groups are affected by the same problem in a similar way**. Otherwise the social actors tend to interpret the situation as a field of real or potential competition for scarce resources, and are not very likely to combine their efforts for solving the problem. When they are affected in a

similar way, and the options for individual escape are minimal, they might recur to the concept of corruption to explain the poor functioning of the institutions. The accusations of corruption might not be substantiated, or they are certainly less substantiated than in the previous case, but the potential for civic action seems to be higher.

Third, **the public protest ends and the scandal loses its momentum at the moment when the main actors decide that problems, issues and values important for the whole society and the whole country, are at stake.** This detail is especially interesting, because most of the existing analyses of public scandals in the social sciences clearly indicate that it is precisely the realization that common values (or interests, or moral imperatives, or generic human capacity of justice) are at stake. It is at this moment when a local protest might turn into a large scandal, when various social actors decide to get involved, despite the fact that they have little to do with the initial event which triggered the scandal. Interestingly, in the cases discussed above it was precisely at this moment when the public action began to lose momentum.

Forth, there is a widespread cynicism regarding the political parties, matched only by the suspicion towards the NGOs. The participants in the public protests regarded ‘the politicians’ as a relatively homogenous category, whose members are equally prone to corruption. **The efforts of the political parties to join and channel the protest, provoked a paradoxical reaction,** the citizens directed their suspicion towards the members of the steering committee, began questioning their motives in a new way (‘why they attacked precisely this politician, and not somebody else’, ‘who would profit from the exposure of this particular politician’, and ergo, ‘who would profit from that action’), gradually accepted a new interpretation of their own action, as something profiting particular political interests, and withdrew from the protest.

III. How to make a corruption scandal

The common characteristics of the public scandals investigated here indicate that anticorruption campaigns, related to specific issues, could mobilize public support. An impressive set of limitations emerged, regarding to the issues, the way how the local actors are involved, and the coping strategies, but the opportunity still exists.

Three main suggestions could be offered at this stage.

First, the most successful public scandals were launched on issues which concerned a variety of social groups in a similar way. The local actors did not compete for specific resources, the corruption was not interpreted as a possible coping strategy, and actually not individual coping strategies were available.

Second, the local networks certainly could be potential partners for such campaign. However, the local NGO or steering committee would be more efficient if its actions are not misinterpreted by the local actors as promotion of the interests of a restricted group. In the most successful cases, the ownership of the scandal constantly changed, new people taking rely from the initial organizers, to be replaced in their turn by other newcomers. At this stage, the involvement of the political parties seemed counterproductive. The activists quickly interpreted their own actions in a new way, as serving a particular party's interests, and withdrew⁷.

Third, the most efficient tactics would probably be to present the specific case, which triggered the public scandal, as unique and exceptional. This approach would help reducing the harm, usually associated with the anticorruption campaigns and to avoid the cynicism trap. It would prevent the unproductive misunderstandings, associated with the uses of the concept of corruption. And finally, this approach has more chances to mobilize public support for solving a specific case. When the citizens are tired with and cynical about anticorruption discourses, a modesty in the discourses might turn more efficient.

⁷ Moreover, in the first and the third case study, the opposition parties seem more interested in joining an anticorruption scandal. Referring to the problem of missing incentive, analyzed by Ivan Krastev and Georgy Ganey, the opposition parties probably will be more motivated for producing and spreading anticorruption discourses.